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NEBRASKANS AND THEIR UNIVERSITY

Recent trends in higher education, both for Nebraska and the nation as a whole, indicate that during the 1980 decade institutions of higher education will be faced with significant problems: the end of enrollment growth, economic retrenchment, program cuts, and underemployment of new college graduates loom heavily on the horizon. For most institutions, the "golden era" of higher education, as experienced during the past twenty-five years, seems to be over.

To a large extent, these problems result from demographic shifts in the age structure of the population, especially the "birth dearth" of the 1960's, and the changing mix of students now attending college. While total enrollments have not yet declined, this is due to the increased participation of both traditional and non-traditional college-age students. In particular, there have been remarkable increases throughout the 1970's in female, older and minority student enrollments.

These conditions prompt forecasters to view the 1980's as a period of enrollment stability or decline. This period is also viewed as one in which there will be fewer "traditional" students and ever-increasing numbers of non-traditional learners. These changes will require institutions to adapt their programs and curriculums to a more diverse population than previously served. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the 1980 decade for administrators, legislators and institutions of higher education will be to delete or curtail some programs while simultaneously implementing new programs and services required by non-traditional students. All of this, of course, must occur

in a context where the funding for higher education is competing for limited resources.

While some of these problems, like curricula adjustment, will have to be made within the institutions themselves, the problem of funding is a more general one--one which requires the judgements of taxpayers, legislators, and government officials.

Consequently, the intent of this report is to assess through survey research (1) the extent to which current services and programs provided by the University of Nebraska affect citizens of the state and (2) the degree of public support for these services. While the information reported here cannot be used directly to answer the difficult problems related to financial decision making, the data provide a baseline and a perspective which should be useful to University administrators, legislators and vested interest groups as they consider the formation of policy and funding for higher education throughout the next decade. To our knowledge, a statewide assessment of University services has never been ascertained for the University nor has the value of these services to citizens been estimated. Consequently, the data reported below can best be viewed as input from citizens which reflect demand for University services.

The Survey

The data in this report come from the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS)-1980, a random probability sample of the adult population of the state. In the Spring of 1980, 1916 persons were interviewed by telephone. A detailed report of this sample, its characteristics, sampling

bias, and the methodology employed in conducting the survey can be found in NASIS-80, #1. The analysis of the sample indicates it is both a valid and reliable survey of the adult population of the state. This report on higher education is based on the responses of the 923 respondents in the survey who were randomly selected to be queried about the University.

Findings

Use of University Services

Table 1 presents the percent of persons who have utilized University services related to education, research, cultural and athletic events and medicine. These data indicate that a significant proportion of the state's population has used these services in the past. Over one-half of the statewide sample have benefited from attending an athletic event, obtaining advice from an extension agent or participating in a cultural program. An additional one-third have participated in academic programs offered through the University and fifteen percent have utilized medical services.

More interestingly, only seventeen percent report never using any of these services and over sixty-five percent report using two or more services. Of the eighty-three percent using these services, the average number of different services used is three. Obviously, the majority of citizens participate in University-sponsored functions and activities, many of which are not directly related to pursuing a degree.

While the data in Table 1 give an overall view of services used by Nebraskans, there are important differences in the extent to which these

services are used by specific categories of the population. Table 2 presents data which show the services used by background characteristics of the sample such as region of the state, family income, educational achievement, and age of respondent. These differences and their implications are summarized below.

Region of the State. Although the University is located in the Southeastern Region, Table 2 indicates that people in Western Nebraska benefit considerably from the University. In fact, in the Panhandle and Southwest Regions, the use of extension services are among the highest in the state (60 and 70 percent respectively), and fairly substantial use is reported for academic, athletic and cultural events as well. An additional ten percent have used the medical services of the University. Given the considerable distances of these regions from the University, these observations are both refreshing and impressive. Although the University is located in the Southeast, it must be concluded that the University successfully extends its programs to all parts of the State.

Family Income and Educational Achievement. With the exception of medical services, there is a direct relationship between both family income and educational achievement with University services. That is, the higher the family income and individual educational achievement, the greater the participation in cultural and athletic events and academic related programs. In fact, of those graduating from college, over 75 percent report participation in these functions. Medical services, on the other hand, are used most frequently by low income families (21 percent), although high income families and high educational achievers also report

substantial use. While medical services depart from the pattern, it can generally be concluded that overall there is a disproportionate use of University services by persons of higher socio-economic status.

Age. With the exception of medical services received, there are no clear relationships between age of respondent and participation in University services. While only 6 percent of those sixty and over have received medical care, 19 percent of those under age sixty received medical care from the University, with the largest category of users coming from the 18-34 age group (21 percent).

There is also a relationshp between age of respondent and attending classes at the University. This relationship, however, is confounded by the fact that the question asks, "have you or your children attended the University or taken classes?" Thus, the older a respondent, the more likely someone in the respondents family has attended the University.

Apart from medical services, then, it can generally be concluded that utilization of University services does not vary by age.

State Tax Support for Higher Education

Recent years have witnessed substantial changes in state and federal financing of higher education, changes which signal a shift in the priority of funding for higher education. These changes also reflect differences in state and federal obligations to fund higher education. For example, the expenditure of funds by institutions of higher education, by source of funds, shows that the federal government accounted for approximately 19 percent in 1967-68 but only 15 percent in 1977-78. During

this same time, expenditures from state sources increased from 24 to 30 percent.[1] Obviously, within recent years public institutions of higher education have become more dependent on state sources of funding.

In comparison to other states, the State of Nebraska is somewhat above average in its commitment to funding higher education (including community colleges and state colleges as well as the University). In fiscal year 1981, the State of Nebraska ranked 20th in per capita expenditures on higher education and 22nd in dollars expended on higher education per $1000 of personal income. These rankings, however, represent a substantial decline over the last four years. Just four years ago, in 1977, the State of Nebraska ranked 11th in terms of per capita expenditures for higher education and between 1977 and 1981 expenditures per $1000 in personal income fell from $13.00 to $12.61.[2]

These trends have caused a growing concern on the part of many regarding the priority of spending for higher education in the state. For these reasons, NASIS-80 respondents were asked whether they thought the University received too much, too little, or just about the right amount of state tax dollars. The results of this question are presented in Table 3 along with comparisons for selected background characteristics.

[1] The Condition of Education, 1978. National Center for Education Statistics, pp. 212-3.

[2] These figures come from M. M. Chambers, State Tax Funds for Operating Expenses in Higher Education, published by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.

While the vast majority of respondents felt that spending for the University was about right, 29 percent didn't know. Furthermore, 13 percent thought the University received too little whereas only 5 percent felt the University received too much. While these differences are not substantial the overall consensus is that the University should receive as much or more than it currently does. Those persons who thought the University receives too little tend to be those who participate more in University programs, come from the Panhandle or Omaha Regions, are more highly educated, and are younger in age. On the other hand, those persons who feel the University receives too much are characterized by moderately low incomes ($7,500 - $14,999), older ages, and less education. The magnitude of these differentials, however, is not great.

Summary

The data from this survey show that substantial numbers of the people of the state benefit from the University through programs and activities sponsored by the University. While some differences are noted, it appears that every region of the state is served and that some western Nebraskans experience more involvement than do those closer to the campus. Some of this, of course, is due to the outreach programs developed through agricultural extension, but significant proportions also benefit from athletic and cultural events, lectures and classes, and medical care. Those with higher educations and family incomes tend to participate more in University-sponsored activities.

Further, the vast majority of people feel that the University is receiving the right amount or too few state funds. Only a very small minority (5 percent) felt the University is receiving too many state tax dollars. No doubt part of the reason for the strong support from the citizens of the State stems from the fact most Nebraskans use the University's many services. As the University broadens its programs and services in the coming years, popular support for the institution should become more widespread. Whether such widespread support should be translated into increased allocations of tax dollars, in the face of increased competition for state revenues, is a matter to be decided by state-level policy makers.

TABLE 1. PERCENT WHO HAVE TAKEN PART IN UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS BY TYPE OF PROGRAM AND EXTENT OF USE.

	Percent who have:
1. Attended an athletic event.	57%
2. Had contact with an extension agent (e.g. reading of newspaper columns, viewing programs on television, visiting with an extension agent).	54
3. Attended a cultural event or visited a museum or gallery.	51
4. Taken classes at the University (Self or children).	34
5. Attended a lecture or program given by a professor or staff member.	29
6. Received medical care from the University.	15

	Percent who have used:
1. No services	17
2. One service	18
3. Two services	18
4. Three services	19
5. Four services	12
6. Five services	11
7. Six services	5
Total	100%

TABLE 2. PERCENT OF PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS WHO USE UNIVERSITY SERVICES (N=923).

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS	SERVICE						
	Cultural Event, Museum or Gallery	Self or Child Attended Classes	Attend Athletic Events	Lecture or Program	Medical Care	Extension Agent	Total
Region of State:							
Panhandle	34	24	39	31	8	60	62
Southwest	42	39	62	38	12	71	95
South Central	47	31	63	27	7	53	111
North Central	47	18	49	21	9	56	113
Omaha Area	50	39	56	31	22	42	311
Southeast	65	39	63	26	17	62	232
Family Income:							
Less than $7,500	39	26	39	18	21	42	208
$7,500 - $14,999	52	29	51	24	10	53	224
$15,000 - $24,999	58	36	65	31	14	59	265
$25,000 or more	59	49	78	48	20	65	171
Highest Educational Achievement:							
Did not complete high school	22	15	29	7	12	40	189
High school diploma	54	31	60	27	14	56	551
Completed junior college	55	43	73	29	9	42	44
Bachelor's degree	74	65	78	60	24	68	101
Post graduate degree	90	76	82	87	37	79	38
Age:							
18-34	55	24	54	26	21	45	351
35-59	55	39	65	34	17	63	320
60 and over	40	42	51	24	6	56	249

TABLE 3. THE UNIVERSITY IS PARTLY SUPPORTED BY STATE TAX DOLLARS. DO YOU THINK THE UNIVERSITY RECEIVES TOO MUCH, TOO LITTLE, OR JUST ABOUT THE RIGHT AMOUNT?

PERCENT SELECTING EACH CATEGORY

	Too much	Too Little	About Right	N
Overall Use:[1]	5	13	53	923
Took part in no programs	12	12	76	87
One to three	8	15	77	367
Four or more	4	28	68	204
Region:				
Panhandle	0	21	79	42
Southwest	4	16	80	68
South Central	13	16	71	83
North Central	8	13	79	78
Omaha Region	5	23	71	220
Southeast	8	17	75	167
Family Income:				
Less than $7,500	6	21	73	125
$7,500 - $14,999	10	15	75	164
$15,000 - $24,999	5	18	77	208
$25,000 or more	5	23	72	130
Highest Educational Achievement:				
Did not complete high school	8	16	76	109
High school diploma	7	15	78	403
Completed junior college	11	18	71	28
Bachelor's degree	6	31	63	84
Post graduate degree	0	44	56	34
Age:				
18-34	6	22	72	280
35-59	6	17	77	235
60 and over	11	16	73	142

[1]Twenty-nine percent of the respondents either had no opinion or did not know whether the amount received by the University was too much, too little, or just about right.

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1980 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1.	Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1980 NASIS. Lynn K. White. Price: $7.50.
2.	Status of Women in Nebraska. Susan Welch and Alan Booth. Price: $1.00.
3.	Congressional District and Planning Region Databook for the State of Nebraska. Lynn K. White. Price: $1.50
4.	Nebraskans and Their Local Government. Susan Welch and Alan Booth. Price: $ .75.
5.	Migration in Nebraska: Movers and Stayers 1977-79. Lynn K. White. Price: $ .75.